

and Oliver North. This administration can and should reveal the truth and put an end to this terrible affair. I cannot understand why a CIA report which details the illegal efforts of Reagan-Bush administration officials to protect the involvement of top-level Contras in drug trafficking should continue to be protected.

Although today's New York Times story is somewhat confusing to follow, the story includes some explosive details. Perhaps the most amazing revelation from these leaks is the admission that the CIA knew of drug trafficking allegations against the infamous Legion of September 15 Contra organization.

This group included the key Contra military commanders, including the Contra's top military commander Enrique Bermudez, and was the core of the most famous of the Contra armies, the FDN. They were comprised of a group of violent ex-bodyguards of Nicaraguan dictator Somoza. And they had proven themselves among the worst human rights violators in the entire Contra-era war.

The Times somewhat inaccurately reported this organization was disbanded, they said, in 1982. Of course, the Legion of September 15 had, by then, been merged into the FDN. That is the Contra army. So we now know that the CIA knowingly worked with Contra rebels involved in drug dealing, including the core of the FDN.

We also know that the CIA and Attorney General had a secret Memorandum of Understanding that allowed drug trafficking by CIA assets to go unreported to law enforcement. This, of course, was confirmed in documents I submitted for the RECORD in May. And we know that CIA officials at the highest levels knew of the Contra drug trafficking activities. What we do not know yet are the many damaging details of the 500-plus-page CIA report. The American people must be able to see this report for themselves.

We forced these investigations. A lot of people said, oh, there was nothing to it. The first half of the CIA reports were unleashed, and that is when we determined the Memorandum of Understanding existed that they did not have to report drug trafficking.

FLORIDA GIVES HEARTFELT THANKS TO FIREFIGHTERS THROUGHOUT THE NATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. FOLEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. FOLEY. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to take a moment to share with Americans all over that for the past month and a half, as many people are aware, Florida has been besieged by wildfires, which have consumed almost half a million acres. The fires have badly strained the resources of local and State fire officials, who have had to respond to more than 2,200 individual fires throughout the State.

Given the widespread devastation, which includes the destruction or damage of more than 400 homes and businesses, firefighters from towns throughout Florida have had to travel to wherever they are needed. But even with this kind of statewide teamwork, the magnitude of the disaster has required help from beyond our borders, and the response across America has been overwhelming: 5,100 firefighters, from almost every State in the Union, as well as Puerto Rico, have uprooted themselves, leaving their families behind, to help Florida in its time of need.

On behalf of all Florida residents and the congressional delegation, I want to give my heartfelt thanks to each and every firefighter, to their family throughout the Nation, who have risked their lives to put an end to the devastation which has so profoundly affected my State.

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Mrs. CLAYTON. Mr. Speaker, I want to share with my colleagues some of the developments in Congress that I am very pleased with.

An amendment to the Higher Education Amendment's Act of 1998 passed the Senate recently after successfully passing the House of Representatives. The amendment requires colleges to distribute voter registration forms to students while enrolled in an institution that receives financial assistance from the Federal Government.

I am excited about this legislation because it provides more opportunities for college students ages 18 through 24 to register to vote.

This group, one of the most mobile groups in this country, has the lowest voter participation rate of all Americans eligible to vote. Colleges would be required to distribute a mail voter registration form to each student enrolled in a degree or certification program. This amendment encourages students to exercise one of the most fundamental rights, the right to vote.

I also want to applaud the action by the Senate in passing an amendment as a part of the Fiscal Year 1999 agriculture appropriations to restore credit to small farmers. The 1996 Farm Bill changed the eligibility criteria for the USDA farm loans.

Anyone who had ever received any kind of debt forgiveness, including restructuring and rescheduling, is now ineligible. Many of these farmers suffered disasters due to flood or drought.

Both the Civil Rights Task Force report and the National Commission on Small Farms cited this change as unduly harsh and recommended that it be modified. In the light of those findings, I introduced the Agriculture Credit Restoration Act of 1998. It would modify the debt forgiveness limitation enacted by the 1996 Farm Bill.

The bill, H.R. 3513, would allow creditworthy USDA borrowers a second chance to receive a loan from USDA after having received debt forgiveness

on a previous loan. A companion piece of legislation in the Senate, S. 1118, was introduced by Senator ROBB.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to recognize that the long-term economic health of rural America depends on a broad and diverse economic base which requires investment in agriculture, rural businesses, infrastructure, housing stock and community facilities.

The Senate amendment, like my bill, would allow farmers and ranchers to remain eligible for USDA credit through two experiences requiring debt forgiveness, including a loan write-down or net recovery buy-out.

The Senate amendment and my bill now will allow one exception to borrowers who experience financial difficulties because of a natural disaster, family medical crisis, or as a part of a settlement of a civil rights case.

The Senate has done a great service for small farmers. They deserve our applause.

Finally, the Senate yesterday inserted another very important language into the agriculture appropriation. The Senate version of the 1999 agriculture appropriation, like the House, contains provisions for lifting the statute of limitations contained in the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, thus allowing black farmers who have complained of discrimination against the Department of Agriculture to have a hearing either before the Department or before the courts.

Where relief is merited, it will now be granted. Cases back as far as 1983 can now be heard. This is indeed historic. Black farmers in America have struggled for more than 4 decades, and the very department designed to help them has over the years hurt them.

I am delighted that, after much effort, we can claim a significant victory. There has been more than a 64-percent decline in black farmers just over the last 15 years, from 6,996 farms in 1978 to 2,498 farms in 1992.

The Department of Justice ruled earlier this year that legal and technical arguments should prevent these farmers from receiving recovery from the damage done to them. The Department's position was taken even in cases where discrimination has been proven, documented and demonstrated recovery was not possible. Yet, the Department continued to receive complaints and, in fact, in its literature encouraged farmers to submit their complaints to them, knowing full well that the Reagan and Bush administrations eliminated the unit to investigate their complaints.

Black farmers' relied on this empty process to their detriment. Mr. Speaker, it is a good thing that we have now come to this point to move this dark history from the chapter.

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The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. DREIER) is recognized for 5 minutes.